

# Shantalle Alam

Youth Volunteer, DCI  
Skokie, IL

As I grew up and realized all the needs of this world, I began to wish that I could do something to help; especially towards my country of origin, Bangladesh. When I attended a seminar in Chicago and heard about DCI, I knew that it was my chance to give back. Ever since that moment when I signed my brother and I up for a sponsorship child I was ready to do more to help this non-profit organization.

From then till now, I have gotten many of my friends involved with DCI as well. Anyone I tell about DCI is also immediately willing to help, which shows the positive image that DCI has. I have run some fundraising activities at Bangladeshi gatherings in Chicago, and I have also individually run some fundraising activities at my high school. Aside from helping keep a DCI stand in all of the Bangladeshi programs in Chicago, some of the activities I personally chose to run included face-painting and ice cream stands for children. Although this is just a beginning to what I hope to do for DCI, it has surely been a pleasure so far.

This past December when I visited Bangladesh I planned on visiting some of the sites that DCI are helping. As my ten days in Bangladesh flew by, I was fortunate to run into Dr. Ehsan Hoque at the Non-Resident Bangladeshi convention. He quickly arranged for me to see some of the work that is being done by DCI and I will never forget that experience.

My brother, cousins, and I first went to the DCI office. We were all honored by such a warm welcome. In addition to meeting the head of this organization we were able to see aid packages that were being sent out later in the day to the affected areas of the Sidr cyclone. Also, we were able to see all the necessities that are provided for the children who are sponsored by DCI.

After, we went to an orphanage just outside Dhaka city. It is quite difficult to explain exactly the emotions that came over us when we first entered, but all I can say is the visit was even more than worthwhile. At first when we were on the first floor, we were shocked by the number of girls that we saw, and how gorgeous and polite they all were. None of them expressed sadness or sorrow; they all greeted us with a smile and a hello. Besides their positive attitude, they were also talented. Two girls performed a dance while another sang the song. We recorded the whole performance; I still watch that sometimes just for a smile. After the first floor our mind set was so positive and encouraging to do more for DCI. Little did I know, there were even younger children upstairs. At first I thought we were having a tour of the rest of the orphanage upstairs, which is when we entered a huge room full of knee high children; all of them running around playing. My cousins and I stood there for a moment in shock. We began playing with them and simply could not stop. All of the kids had a wonderful sense of humor. We also saw new born babies in their cribs and were even more shocked. We found that one of the two newborns there was only a few weeks old and was left in the hospital. That concluded our visit to the orphanage. My favorite moment there was seeing all the kids from every window in the orphanage waving goodbye and telling us to come back soon. That was also the moment I promised myself I would come back soon to Bangladesh just to visit them again.

We then visited several sites where child labor is prominent. It was definitely a more vivid picture to actually see than to hear about it in the news. Sadly, we knew that it was not their choice to begin work at such an early age. However, we also knew that the child and his/her family could not afford to send them to school. Because of this unfortunate situation, they are sent to work bright and



early each and every morning. We were glad to see the sites not yet touched by DCI because it allowed us to understand the before and after affects of this organization. This site where child labor was active was a place that hopefully in the coming years would not remain.

The last place we went on this mini-journey were the slums. This was a very different experience on my part for many reasons. One of the reasons were that each time I went to Bangladesh I always saw these tin "houses" set up on the way to our village or from this past December, on the way to Sylhet. I could only imagine how much more was inside. However when we actually went inside these alleys full of them, the image was clear- more needed to be done to help Bangaldesh on my part. Also, the aid of DCI is enormous and remarkable, but from the United States, more could and needed to be done immediately. We saw whole families living in a matter of a few square feet. One room per family served as their living room, dining room, and every other accommodation that other families fortunately had. The image that I will not be able to forget from our short visit to the slums was a small plate of rice that was full of flies but still served as the meal for the entire family.

Overall, this tour was hopefully one of many to come. Most of our way back to Dhaka city was spent in silence. My brother and I talked about how amazing it truly was for all those children to be so polite. No matter their situation, none of them asked for a single penny, they were just glad to have us there and visit. There was simply nothing to say that could better what we just saw. I was hoping for some words of relief or happiness that we actually got to see what we did, but I also knew that would not make the mood in the car better. We all knew that the silence was because of our stirring minds that were searching for a way to make all this better. So we left that day at that. In the back of our minds the images from that day are still clear. In many situations that day is the motivation that keeps me hard at work whether it is at school or around the house. I sometimes find me telling myself that someday soon I will be more capable than now to do more for Bangladesh, and maybe the hard work now will help me later on, I know all of us from that day feel the same.

May 20-2008  
Shantalle Alam  
Youth Volunteer, DCI  
Skokie, IL